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King Suspect Is Escapee From Prison

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A Missouri State Penitentiary escapee named James Earl Ray was identified by the FBI yesterday as the man masquerading as Eric Starvo Galt, sought throughout the Nation in connection with the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The announcement, made here by Attorney General Ramsey Clark, marked the first time in the two weeks since Dr. King's death in Memphis that the FBI disclosed a positive identification of a suspect.

Ray, 40, escaped last April 23 from the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City, Mo., where he was in his seventh year of a 20-year armed-robbery sentence.

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover said agents linked the case to Ray through latent fingerprints. Hoover's formal announcement did not say where the prints were found, but several prints were known to have been taken by the FBI in the rooming house from which the assassin shot Dr. King as the civil rights leader stood on a motel balcony.

FBI spokesmen said the prints were traced to Ray after a painstaking, page-by-page search of fingerprints filed against more than 53,000 persons for whom "wanted notices" have been published.

Ray, who has an extensive criminal record, has used not only the Eric Galt alias but also the names Harvey Lowmeyer, John Willard, James McBride, James Walton, W. C. Herron and James O'Conner, the FBI said.

His whereabouts from April, 1967, when he escaped, until August, 1967, when he reportedly surfaced as Eric Starvo Galt, a tenant of a rooming house in Birmingham, Ala., are apparently unclear.

The seeming discrepancies—earlier accounts that "Galt" was in New Orleans in 1965 when Ray was in prison—were evidently based on stories that he himself fabricated.

Missouri Penitentiary records show Ray was born in Alton, Ill., an industrial town of 43,000 persons located north of and across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Mo.

He achieved a 10th grade education, penitentiary officials said, and began developing an arrest record in 1949. He worked as a baker and laborer.

He served prison terms for burglary in California, armed robbery in Illinois and forgery of money orders in Missouri during the 1950s.

In 1960, he was convicted of armed robbery in a $150 gro-

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...spect James Earl ...sted in St. Louis, ...y of grocery store.

1960—FBI released this photo of Ray yesterday. It was taken while he was in Missouri prison.

1966—Another photo of Ray taken at Missouri State Penitentiary, where he escaped last April.

1968—Ray photo used by FBI seeking "Eric Starvo Galt." (Eyes were drawn by artist).

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F.I Says Galt Is Ray, Who Fled Prison in 1967

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cery store holdup in St. Louis, and began a 20-year term on March 17, 1960.

Penitentiary records clerk Harry Lauf said Ray made two abortive jailbreaks, in 1961 and 1966, before he was successful last April when he was believed to have hidden in a wooden crate used for transporting loaves of bread from the Penitentiary to the Renz penitentiary farm five miles away.

"There is evidence—we never did find conspirators—that he was hidden with the bread on top of his body," Reuters news agency quotes Warden Harold Swenson as saying. "The bread arrived in bad condition at the farm."

"He was caught going over the wall in 1961," said Lauf, "and they found him hiding in a ventilator in 1966.

Aside from his escape habits, said Lauf, Ray was a "fairly good" prisoner.

After the 1966 jailbreak attempt, Ray was sent to the state mental hospital in Fulton, Mo., for observation, but was returned to the penitentiary without any finding of mental disorder, hospital officials said.

FBI director Hoover said Ray was an enlisted man in the U.S. Army from February, 1946, to December, 1948, and was given a general discharge because of "lack of adaptability" to military service. While in service, he also served a three-month sentence at hard labor for being drunk and breaking arrest, Hoover said.

He described Ray as 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighing 163 to 174 pounds with blue eyes, brown hair and a small scar on his forehead and another on the palm of his right hand.

Penitentiary officials said Ray was a "loner," which matches descriptions by persons who knew the man who called himself Galt in the Birmingham rooming house.

In a "wanted" poster for Ray when he escaped last year, the pamphlet reportedly listed two brothers, John Ray, of St. Louis, and Jerry W. Ray, of Wheeling, Ill., United Press International reported.

The FBI has denied reports that it has a brother of Eric Starvo Galt in custody and that the brother is aiding the search for the assassin.

When the FBI obtained a conspiracy warrant against Galt earlier this week, it charged that Galt "and an individual who he alleged to be his brother" entered into a conspiracy to deprive Dr. King of his civil rights. The FBI refused to give details on the "brother" yesterday.

UPI also reported that an FBI alert was issued Thursday to all law enforcement agencies in Imperial County, Calif., for a man fitting Galt's description seen near the Mexican border. The alert said the man was seen Monday on a back road four and a half miles west of El Centro, Calif.